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ATLANTA
INMAN
By TRACY THOMPSON

RETIRED ADMIRAL BOBBY INMAN IS THE NATION'S FORMER NO. 2 SPY, AND HE KNOWS THINGS. THURSDAY AFTERNOON HE WOULD BE HE PUT HIS "TIPTOEING THROUGH THE MINE FIELD OF CLASSIFIED DATA" AT A SEMINAR ON NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL HERE WHEN HE MENTIONED AS A CASUAL-REJOICE SOMETHING THAT MADE SEVERAL IN HIS SMALL AUDIENCE GRASP.

THE PROBLEM WITH UNMANNED AMERICAN SATELLITES, THE CIA'S FORMER DEPUTY DIRECTOR SAID, IS THAT THEY CAN MISTAKE THE FLAMES FROM A RUPTURED SOVIET GAS PIPELINE FOR THOSE OF A LAUNCHED NUCLEAR MISSILE. AND INMAN SAID: "THERE IS A FINE INSTANCE OF THAT."

DESPITE THAT EVIDENCE OF A NEAR-MISS WITH NUCLEAR HOLOCUSTS, HOWEVER, INMAN SAID THURSDAY: "I REJECT ABSOLUTELY" THE "DAY AFTER" SCENARIO OF NUCLEAR WAR, DEPICTING A WORLD LID WRECK BY A PRE-EMPTIVE SOVIET NUCLEAR STRIKE.

INSTEAD, INMAN SAID, THE REAL DANGER FACING THE WORLD TODAY WOULD BE A CONVENTIONAL WAR IN EUROPE THAT ESCALATED INTO A NUCLEAR CONFRONTATION; AS WELL AS THE SPREAD OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS TECHNOLOGY TO UNSTABLE THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES, WHICH INMAN SAID HAS BEEN LARGELY IGNORED.

"THE SCENARIOS OF A BOLT FROM THE BLUE ARE INVALID IN EVERY PREMISE THAT I CAN TRACK," SAID INMAN, WHO HEADED THE NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY UNTIL HE WAS TAPPED BY PRESIDENT REAGAN TO BE THE NO. 2 MAN AT THE CIA.

INMAN SPOKE AT A DAYLONG CONFERENCE ON ARMS CONTROL SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE SOUTHERN CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND THE WASHINGTON-BASED ARMS CONTROL ASSOCIATION.

HELD IN AN ATLANTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY DRINKING ROOM, THE SEMINAR DREW A PANEL OF INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN FOREIGN POLICY EXPERTS TO TALK TO SOME 30 WRITERS AND EDITORS FROM NINE SOUTHERN STATES.

THE CONFERENCE WAS PUNCTUATED AT ONE POINT BY AN IMPROMPTU EXCHANGE BETWEEN INMAN AND TED TURNER, OWNER OF ATLANTA-BASED TURNER BROADCASTING CO. AND ITS CABLE NEWS NETWORK.

TURNER ROSE AFTER INMAN'S TALK TO DECLARE: "WE HAD SLAVERY 120 YEARS AGO; WE HAD RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION ALL OVER THE WORLD. IN OUR LIFETIME WE'VE DONE AWAY WITH SEGREGATION. WHY DON'T WE FOCUS ON THAT? THIS DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE - ALL I'VE HEARD ABOUT IS ARMS CONTROL, WHICH IS PROBABLY GOOD, BUT THERE'S A POSITIVE ALTERNATIVE."

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TURNER SUGGESTED THAT THE UNITED STATES STEP UP CULTURAL EXCHANGES WITH THE SOVIET UNION; EXPORTING FARMERS, FARM MACHINERY AND STUDENTS TO IMPROVE INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND PERHAPS EVEN AVOID NUCLEAR WAR.

"HOW'S THE TIME TO PLANS?" INMAN REPLIED MILDLY. BUT HE NOTED TODAY'S SOVIET LEADERS ARE OLD AND INFLEXIBLE. TURNER'S SUGGESTIONS, HE SAID: "ISN'T GOING TO HAVE MUCH PROSPECT (OF SUCCESS) UNTIL WE GET NEW (SOVIET) LEADERS."

THOUGH INMAN DISCOUNTED THE "BOLT FROM THE BLUE" SCENARIO THURSDAY, HE ADMITTED THAT UNTIL RELATIVELY RECENT TIMES IT HAD BEEN A REAL POSSIBILITY. AS LATE AS 1987, HE SAID, AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE KNEW THAT THE SOVIETS WERE PRACTICING A FIRST-STRIKE APPROACH; THOUGH "THE SOVIETS NO LONGER REGARD A PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE AS A VALID TACTIC."

THE REASON: IMPROVED TECHNOLOGY THAT HELPS EACH SIDE KEEP A WATCHFUL EYE ON THE OTHER. ONE DEVELOPMENT ON THAT FRONTIER IS THE FLIGHT FOR A MANNED SPACE STATION; A GOAL SET HEDGEDRY NIGHT BY PRESIDENT REAGAN IN HIS STATE OF THE UNION SPEECH AND ONE THAT GOT INMAN'S TENTATIVE ENDORSEMENT THURSDAY.

CITING HIS NEAR-MISS STORY, INMAN SAID THAT "MANNED SPACE STATIONS IS NOT AN INHERENTLY BAD IDEA... THERE'S NO MACHINE BETTER THAN THE HUMAN MIND AT SORTING OUT INFORMATION."

HE WOULD SUPPORT THE CONCEPTS HE SAID; AS LONG AS IT WAS NOT "A SUBROGEE EFFORT TO MOVE NUCLEAR WAR TO SPACE;" A PROSPECT FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE DEAN RUSK ALREADY WARNED AGAINST IN A RECENT SPEECH IN ATLANTA.

OTHER SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS MOVED THE ISSUE OF ARMS CONTROL BACK DOWN FROM THE STRATOSPHERE TO EARTH - SPECIFICALLY: WESTERN EUROPE, WHERE THE UNITED STATES LAST NOVEMBER DEPLOYED INTERMEDIATE-RANGE PERSHING 2 MISSILES OVER THE VEHEMENT OBJECTIONS OF THE SOVIETS.

"WHEN TWO BULL ELEPHANTS MEET TO FIGHT, IT'S THE UNDERGROWTH THAT SUFFERS!" NOTED CHRISTOPHER HAKINS, AN EXPERT IN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS AT THE CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE, REFERRING TO THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN WEST GERMANY AFTER THE MISSILE DEPLOYMENT.

THE SOVIETS WALKED OUT OF TALKS IN GENEVA ON INTERMEDIATE-RANGE NUCLEAR FORCES LAST NOVEMBER TO PROTEST THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE PERSHING MISSILES. THOUGH DIMITRI SIMEON, AN EXPERT IN SOVIET AFFAIRS AT THE CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT, SAID THOSE TALKS WERE NOW "A PART OF HISTORY;" NEVER TO BE RESUMED; BOTH HE AND HAKINS INDICATED THAT THEY THOUGHT THE ISSUE OF SHORT-RANGE NUCLEAR MISSILES IN EUROPE SHOULD BECOME PART OF STRATEGIC ARMS REDUCTION TALKS IN GENEVA.